

# JACQUES PRÉVERT

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1 Childhood</b>                               | <b>1</b>  |
| Sumptuous poverty                                |           |
| A " down to earth / starry song "                |           |
| <b>2 Surrealism</b>                              | <b>2</b>  |
| A period of gestation                            |           |
| Mixing the real and the surreal                  |           |
| <b>3 The October Group</b>                       | <b>3</b>  |
| The solidarity of a proletarian theatre          |           |
| Encouraging a working class theatre              |           |
| From the journey to Moscow                       |           |
| to the trial in Moscow                           |           |
| <b>4 The cinema</b>                              |           |
| His first steps as a screenwriter                |           |
| Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné                 | <b>4</b>  |
| Films and literature                             |           |
| A consistent approach to script writing          |           |
| <b>5 The first books</b>                         |           |
| Prévert in the book shops                        |           |
| <b>6 Paroles</b>                                 | <b>5</b>  |
| An original variety                              |           |
| <b>7 Time for literature</b>                     |           |
| Books to read and look at                        |           |
| <b>8 Collages</b>                                |           |
| Tender or cruel                                  |           |
| <b>9 Songs</b>                                   | <b>6</b>  |
| When writings fly away                           |           |
| <b>10 A rebel with a cause in his late years</b> |           |
| Solidarity with the oppressed                    |           |
| of the world                                     |           |
| <b>11 A rejection of definitions</b>             |           |
| " Poetry is what we dream about "                |           |
| <b>12 A self-taught man</b>                      |           |
| Literary likes and dislikes                      |           |
| Painting   | <b>7</b>  |
| Music  |           |
| <b>13 Language unmasked</b>                      |           |
| A distaste for the commonplace                   |           |
| <b>14 Masculine and feminine</b>                 | <b>8</b>  |
| " always He/Why not She ? "                      |           |
| <b>15 Animals</b>                                |           |
| Living creatures like us                         |           |
| <b>16 The craftsman of language</b>              |           |
| " putting a fountain pen                         |           |
| through words "                                  |           |
| <b>Biographical notes</b>                        | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Filmography</b>                               | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Selected bibliography</b>                     | <b>12</b> |

## 1 Childhood

### Sheet 1

#### Sumptuous poverty

" He's rather like you ... one eye is cheerful and the other a little sad ", remarks Françoise, comparing François, the young man she loves, to her teddy bear, in *Le jour se lève* [Daybreak], a film by Marcel Carné for which Jacques Prévert wrote the dialogue in 1939. This teddy bear, which will die metaphorically with François (played by Jean Gabin), is, of course, part of his childhood. It resembles Jacques Prévert the adult, who in turn was like an older brother to Jacques Prévert the child. This sad yet cheerful little boy, who he never betrayed, can be encountered in a number of his works. He appears, for instance, in " Mémoires ", partly published in 1959 by *Elle* magazine, and in full in 1972, and at the beginning of the collection *Choses et autres* [Things and Others], under the title " Enfance " [Childhood]. His parents are present too, a couple full of contrasts, like the teddy bear. Suzanne was a happy woman by nature, well-balanced and reliable, while André Prévert was inclined to be depressive and unstable. Yet these two people loved each other, and despite a somewhat chaotic life – unemployment of the father and frequent moves – the early childhood of Jacques, first spent in Neuilly and then in Paris, in the 6th arrondissement, seemed to have been happy years. Suzanne taught him to read with fairy tales such as *The Blue Bird* or *The Beauty and the Beast*. André, who was a literary, theatre and film critic in his spare time, would take him to the cinema and the theatre. At times, they lived in near poverty. But as Jacques wrote later in " L'enfant de mon vivant " [The Child that still lives inside me], a poem which was published in 1955 in *La Pluie et le Beau Temps* [Rain and Fine Weather], " it was the most sumptuous poverty ".

### Sheet 2

#### A " down to earth / starry song "

One day in 1906, the young Jacques found himself having to reason with his father who wanted to throw himself into the port of Toulon. In the end, father and child walked off together, hand in hand, just like Charlie Chaplin and the *kid*. For Prévert, this reversal of roles was a healthy one because he felt that since children were free of prejudice and social conformity, they were capable of taking adults in hand. His refusal to accept imposed ideas took root during his childhood which, he claimed, continued to linger in him. This inspired André Breton to observe, " Prévert has the supreme art of taking short cuts to give us back, in a flash, the responsive and radiant attitude of childhood, and to fill the reservoir of rebellion indefinitely. " Jacques was enrolled successively in two secular schools in the Latin Quarter, but in 1908 he found himself in a Catholic establishment in Rue d'Assas. However, the anticlericalism reflected in his work appears to have stemmed mainly from the antipathy he felt for his paternal grandfather, who he nicknamed " Auguste the Severe ". It was this strait-laced, and



even royalist, Catholic who saved André from unemployment – out of a sense of duty towards the family – by finding him a job at the Central Office of Charitable Works in Paris. Jacques used to accompany his father on visits to the destitute, and in this way discovered the depths of poverty. Yet the poor gave pretty names to their street “ to brighten things up a bit ”, and on one occasion he saw a sick baby listening with rapture to a canary that seemed to be singing specially for him. As a child examining the world, he discovered a landscape painted in many hues. This is why he rejected simplistic contrasts, especially between the imagination and reality, for the song of “ L'enfant de mon vivant ” is a “ down to earth/starry song ”. He decided life needed to be changed, convinced that dreaming about it was already a good way to start.

## 2 Surrealism

### Sheet 3 A period of gestation

Jacques Prévert took part in the activities of the surrealists between 1925 and 1929. This self-taught man, who left school shortly after obtaining his primary school certificate, disliked schoolteachers and exams but was eager to exchange views about the books he read, the films he saw or the paintings he admired. He disapproved of what he described as “ those great, revered swindlers ”, the army, the church and the police. He was always game for a debate and, if necessary, had no hesitation in fighting. By chance, his new friends were, like himself, rebellious, anti-establishment and curious about everything. When Breton started to impose – rather than share – ideas, Prévert broke away from the movement. But although he wrote little during these years, it was an important period of gestation, a term Breton himself used. “ I do not know of any lighter gestation than that which ended in giving birth to *Tentative de description d'un dîner de têtes à Paris-France* [Attempt to Describe a Dinner of Heads in Paris-France], *Je ne mange pas de ce pain-là* [I'd Rather Starve than Eat that Kind of Bread] or *Exercices de style* [Exercises in Style]. It was like a laboratory for humour in the surrealistic sense. “ His association with Benjamin Péret, the most violently anti-clerical of the group, and Raymond Queneau, who literally devoured words and would one day admit that he had been influenced by the future author of *Paroles* [Words], was a wise choice. However, Prévert needed to free himself from the stifling personality of André Breton to be able to be himself completely. The energetic burst of anger entitled “ *Mort d'un Monsieur* ” [Death of a Gentleman], written against the “ pope ” of surrealism in 1930, was full of cultural references, unusual images, and a brilliant play on words, proving that he had finally found his own style. “ *Mort d'un Monsieur* ” marked the birth of a writer.

### Sheet 4 Mixing the real and the surreal

Despite his break from Breton's group, Prévert did not abandon surrealism for he was drawn to all that was strange and disturbing. He believed dreams and folly could lead the way to another reality. Although he published a few accounts of dreams in *Fatras* and *Choses et autres*, and on several occasions made references to mental illnesses, for example, in “ *Sainte Âme* ” [a pun on Saint Anne, patron saint of mental hospitals, and âme meaning soul] and “ *La Femme acéphale* ” [The Headless Woman], he preferred to introduce dreamlike elements where

they were least expected, conjuring up the fantasies and marvels of the most realistic world. Sometimes a few metaphors or unusual comparisons are enough to push the reader into a surrealist world. Everything can be transformed. When the ear of “ *Baronne Crin* ” in “ *Riviera* ” falls from her head “ like an old shingle from a roof ”, she looks down at the ground and mistakes it “ for a dead leaf brought by the wind ”. As for the bishop in “ *La Crosse en l'air* ” [The Crook in the Air], he is “ soaked like an old blotter / abandoned under the rain in the courtyard of a dismal town hall ”. Although these metamorphoses or comparisons may, at first sight, seem ludicrous, they have the power to create suggestive equivalents. The author's keen sense of observation sheds light on faces and landscapes in such a way that everything seems to be “ both real and surreal ”. But Prévert frequently introduces fabulous and unexpected characters, marooning readers or spectators who are accustomed to established genres, from all their familiar points of reference. For example, in “ *La Crosse en l'air* ” a man encounters an alley cat in the street who asks him to help a bird. In *Les Portes de la nuit* [The Gates of the Night], a mysterious tramp claiming to be Destiny seems to know the future of everyone whose path he crosses. And in “ *Encore une fois sur le fleuve* ” [Once Again on the River]. Misery is disguised as an old woman. For the poet, even when he launches words like projectiles, reality overwhelms the person who tries to reproduce it. He puts it humorously in “ *Promenade de Picasso* ”, in which “ a painter of reality / vainly tries to paint / the apple as it is. ”

### Sheet 5 But leaving nothing to chance

Prévert could push his unusual comparisons very far, as in his famous “ *Inventaire* ” [Inventory], with associations which apparently have nothing to do with each other, or in “ *Cortège* ” with its reversed syntagms. A closer look at these two texts immediately brings to light associations or inversions that are not completely arbitrary, as was often believed. Prévert first strings words together, following a more or less unconscious pattern of ideas (“ One stone / two houses / three ruins ...”), but he does this deliberately to catch the reader off guard and then strike home. One “ man decorated with the Legion of Honour ” appears after “ one door with its doormat ” while “ one boil ” is next to “ one cleric ”, an association that is clearly not devoid of significance. In “ *Cortège* ”, the irony is obvious, “ *Un canard à Sainte Hélène avec un Napoléon à l'orange / Une conservateur de Samothrace avec une victoire de cimetière* ” [One duck in Saint Helena with one Napoleon à l'orange / One curator of Samothrace with one victory of cemetery]. In this particular instance, Prévert takes some distance from surrealism. Even though he amused himself at least once by composing a text in automatic writing, he did not publish it. He knew that chance did not always get things right and that it was better to give it a helping hand. It is again a young boy – as usual his double – who, in *Imaginaires* [Make-Believe], published in 1970, sheds some light on this approach. Bored with the picture of the well-behaved child illustrated in his book and reflected in his mirror, he tears it up and flings the fragments of the torn page into the air. But he then applies himself to re-arranging “ this disorder as he pleases. ”

### 3 The October Group

#### Sheet 6 The solidarity of a proletarian theatre

Two years after he broke away from the surrealists, Prévert joined another group which once again gave him an opportunity to express his spirit of rebellion, but this time as an author. Some members of the theatrical company, Prémices, which belonged to the French Federation of Workers' Theatre, felt that the stage director, Roger Legris, had neglected their political struggle, and they therefore decided to go their own way. One of these protesters, Lazare Fuchsmann, had visited Germany where he discovered the theatre movement started by Erwin Piscator. Continuing the trend set by the Russian revolutionary theatre, Piscator had tried to use the stage as a platform to arouse popular interest in social and political questions. The goal of his Proletarian Theatre, founded in 1920, was to propagate the idea of "the class struggle" and to reach out to the working classes in their own places of work and leisure. Having decided to follow the same path, the dissidents of Prémices started to look around for an author. They sought the advice of Léon Moussinac who recommended Jacques Prévert. A number of journals had recently published some examples of his corrosive humour, notably, "Souvenirs de famille ou l'Ange garde-chiourme" [Family Souvenirs or the Martinet Angel] in *Bifur* and "Tentative de description d'un dîner de têtes à Paris-France" in *Commerce*. Prévert had seen *The Threepenny Opera* by a collaborator of Piscator, Bertold Brecht, as filmed by Pabst. The idea of setting up a theatre company, in which the individual stepped aside in favour of the group, immediately appealed to him. Its objective was to produce plays supporting workers in their strikes and claims, and to speak not only on their behalf but also with them. The troupe took on the name of the October Group.

#### Sheet 7 Encouraging a working class theatre

Between 1932 and 1936, Prévert wrote plays and spoken choirs (known as texts for several voices) for the October Group. He put the spotlight on the high and mighty of this world (politicians, sovereigns and industrialists), underlining their failings and absurdities by creating extravagant caricatures, describing their harmful and egoistic nature, revealing their schemes and tricks, and inciting the audience first to laugh and then to express their outrage. The characters in *La Bataille de Fontenoy* [The Battle of Fontenoy], written in 1933, were politicians who were well known at the time. The playwright borrowed their own speeches to show how pernicious and empty they were. The following year, in 1933, *La Famille Tuyau de Poêle* [The Top-hat Family] exposed the other side of the coin, portraying the bourgeois in their intimate environment, outwardly respectable, but indulging in adultery, incest, homosexuality and love affairs with their servants behind closed doors, while hypocritically advocating virtue. Thanks to Prévert's use of caricatures, spectators no longer allowed themselves to be impressed by those with power or money, often one and the same thing. Prévert also called upon the working class to create its own theatre. The ambition of the principal playwright of the October Group was to reduce bourgeois art to ashes. By addressing the general public directly, Prévert encouraged ordinary people to make use of words because he knew that reinventing art meant reinventing life, and vice versa. He introduced workers and peasants in his adaptation of *The Painting of Marvels* by

Cervantes (1935), characters that were not included in the original version. As in many of his other plays, he involved the working classes, allowing them to take over the stage to turn it into their own show or celebration.

#### Sheet 8 From the journey to Moscow to the trial in Moscow

The name the October Group chose for itself had strong political implications. It was clearly an allusion not only to the Russian theatre but also to the Russian revolution. Prévert was tempted to join the Communist Party, along with a number of other surrealists, but in the end he did not become a member. He was, however, closest to the Party during the period when he wrote for the October Group. He shared their internationalism, pacifism and determination to fight against social injustice. A trip to Russia in 1933 with the Group, chosen by referendum to compete in the International Workers' Theatre Olympiad in Moscow, did not make him change his opinion radically. But as of 1935, he was irritated by the new attitude of communists who started to brandish the French flag, sing *La Marseillaise*, make overtures to the Catholics, and talk of the need for war. At the same time, the October Group disintegrated for personal, financial and political reasons. Finally, in December 1936, Prévert signed the "Appeal to Men", organized by the magazine *Les Humbles*, demanding an international commission of enquiry to be set up following the Moscow trial.

### 4 The Cinema

#### Sheet 9 The first steps as a screen writer

Although Jacques Prévert frequently published poems and other texts in magazines in the thirties, he was known mainly for his film scripts and dialogues during this period. In 1932, his brother, Pierre Prévert directed *L'affaire est dans le sac* [The Deal is in the Bag], with a dialogue written by Jacques and adapted from a screenplay by a mysterious Hungarian, Akos Rathony. One of the sequences, now a classic, shows a patriot (Jacques Bernard-Brunius) in the shop of a hatter (Carette), asking for a genuine "French beret". The salesman successfully sells him a cap discreetly turned around. But the old veterans did not appreciate this kind of humour. With Richard Pottier, a film director who is unjustly unknown today, Prévert amused himself by changing, and even reversing, social situations. *Si j'étais le patron* [If I Were the Boss] is his unsigned adaptation of a German film by J.A. Hübler-Kahla for a film directed by Richard Pottier in 1934. It tells the story of a worker who is suddenly placed as the head of a company by the main shareholder, a cheerful fellow with a ready tongue, especially when drunk. *Un oiseau rare* [A Rare Bird], another film that Richard Potter directed in 1935, is adapted – and signed this time – from a subject by Erich Kästner which had been turned into a novel and a play. It is about the misadventures of a rich industrialist who takes it into his head to pass off for a pauper and unwittingly lends his status as a wealthy personage man to a penniless young man. Although the films directed by Richard Pottier are adaptations, their topics highlight a point of view dear to the scriptwriter who believed that the value of human beings is often in inverse proportion to their social position, and that the real gentlemen are to be found among the people. Prévert also wrote the dialogue for Jean Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* [The Crime of Monsieur Lange] in 1935, another film about the switching of roles. In this film, the employees of a printing house take advantage of the disappearance of their boss, who they believe is dead, to set up a co-operative.

Sheet 10 **Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné**

The young film director Marcel Carné had seen a performance of *La Bataille de Fontenoy* by the October Group. He was so impressed by the trenchant humour of the repartees that he asked the author to adapt a script for *Jenny* by Pierre Rocher, and to write a dialogue for the film. This was in 1936, and it marked the beginning of a harmonious collaboration which would last for over ten years and produce a number of masterpieces : *Drôle de drame* [Bizarre, Bizarre] in 1937, *Le Quai des brumes* [Port of Shadows] in 1938, *Le Jour se lève* [Daybreak] in 1939, *Les Visiteurs du soir* [The Devil's Envoys] in 1942, *Les Enfants du paradis* [The Children of Paradise] in 1945 and *Les Portes de la nuit* [The Gates of the Night] in 1946, in addition to *La Marie du Port* in 1949, less known because Prévert did not sign his contribution to the adaptation (of a novel by Simenon) and the dialogue. It was sometimes asserted that the direct and popular style of Prévert's dialogues did not match the refined and aesthetic pictures of Carné. But this was to underrate the wealth and variety of his style, a blend of humour and poetry, fantasy and realism, lyricism and imagination, which gave the impression of being spontaneous but was in fact the result of meticulous work. Georges Sadoul talked of "poetic realism" when recalling the Prévert-Carné partnership, while Pierre Mac Orlan described it as "the fantastic and the social". These expressions clearly reflect the dual nature of these films, with characters from a modest background but with action taking place in the splendid and disquieting sets designed by Alexandre Trauner against music composed by Maurice Jaubert or Joseph Kosma. Whether the leading characters roam through a consuming mist, take refuge at the top of a gigantic building that isolates them, or struggle to find their way through a crowd that separates them, they are usually the victims of destructive, possessive and jealous personalities, incarnating an oppressive society. Yet the dialogue suggests the road to salvation through solidarity, revolt, a rejection of convention, and love combined with a respect for the liberty of the other.

Sheet 11 **Films and literature**

In " La Boutique d'Adrienne ", Jacques Prévert described how important a role literature played in his life. His love for books and authors is evident in several of the films in which he participated. His adaptation of *L'Hôtel du libre échange* [Free-Trade Hotel] for Marc Allégret in 1934 gave him an opportunity to share his admiration of Feydeau, while his dialogue for *Lumière d'été* [The Light of Summer], written in 1943 for Jean Grémillon makes several references to Shakespeare. The same applies to the dialogue he wrote for *Les Enfants du paradis*, directed by Marcel Carné, and *Les Amants de Véronne* [The Lovers of Verona] directed by André Cayatte in 1948. In some cases, he diverged from the original work not out of a desire to move away from it but because a text that inspired him frequently pointed to other directions. Thus, while basing himself on the novel by Mac Orlan, he remodelled the characters in *Le Quai des brumes* (1938) but without betraying the atmosphere created by the writer, as attested by the " unreserved " approval of the latter. In other cases, the adapted work served as a point of departure. An example is *The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep*, a very short tale by Andersen, which was turned into a long animated film by Paul Grimault. Although an edited version, rejected by the authors,

was screened in 1953, the film was released in 1980 in a form approved by them, under the title, *Le Roi et l'Oiseau*. This taste for the enchanting world of fairy tales grew with other adaptations of stories by Andersen, for example, *The Little Soldier* (1948), also with cartoons by Grimault, and *Little Claus and Big Claus* (1964), directed by Pierre Prévert. For the film *Notre-Dame de Paris* [The Hunchback of Notre-Dame], directed by Jean Delannoy in 1956, he remained faithful to the original work. The adaptation and screenplay writer felt close to Victor Hugo, with whom he shared a dislike for dogma and the perversions it generated, a feeling of tenderness for ordinary people and a sense of irony and the grotesque.

Sheet 12 **A consistent approach to script writing**

The fruitful and predominant collaboration with Carné overshadowed Jacques Prévert's work with other film directors and gave the impression that he stopped writing for the screen after 1946. Yet he worked with many other film directors, known and unknown, confirming his consistent approach to writing for the cinema through these various associations. The films which he worked on all show his characteristic and easily recognisable tone: a sense of irony, brilliant word games, a skilful manipulation of clichés, and a novel interpretation of improperly used generalisations, together with words of love and humour. His themes complemented each other, developing from one film to another. *Les disparus de Saint-Agil* [Boy's School], directed by Christian-Jaque in 1938, highlights the poetic and creative world of childhood, whereas *L'Enfer des anges* [The Hell of Angels], made the following year by the same director, focuses on oppressed and destitute childhood. *Sortilèges* [The Sorcerer/The Bellman], also directed by Christian-Jaque in 1945, plunges spectators into the strange and bewitching atmosphere of ancient superstitions, also echoed in the " Agnès Bernauer " sketch for *Les Amours célèbres* [Famous Lovers], directed by Michel Boisrond in 1961. In this script, as in the one for *Les Amants de Véronne* by Cayatte, Prévert repeats his firm conviction that love must survive, even under the threat and imminence of death. *Adieu Léonard* (1943), directed by Pierre Prévert, combines his fascination for romantic love affairs and his dream of a libertarian society. *La Maison du passeur* [The Ferryman's House] by the same director (1965), pokes fun at war veterans, already the object of derision in *L'Affaire est dans le sac* [The Deal is in the bag], and the virulent advocates of war, also mentioned in "Agnès Bernauer ". *L'Arche de Noé* [Noah's Ark], directed by Henri Jacques in 1946, shows that inventive genius springs from the people, a theme already illustrated in *Si j'étais le patron* (1934) by Richard Pottier.

**5 The first books**

Sheet 13 **Prévert in the book shops**

Between 1929 and 1945, many of Jacques Prévert's poems appeared in reviews or were circulated in typewritten form, especially in youth hostels. However, during this period he earned his living by writing scripts and dialogues for films, so it did not occur to him to have his poetry published in book form. Then suddenly in 1946, several collections signed by him appeared at the same time. In April, *Le Cheval de trois* [The Trojan Horse, a pun on Troie, the French word for Troy, and trois, meaning three] was published, containing a collection of

thirteen of his poems, together with thirteen poems by André Virel and another thirteen by André Verdet. This was followed in June by *Histoires* [Stories], with thirty of his poems, thirty by André Verdet and thirty drawings by Mayo (the designer, among other things, of the costumes for *Les Enfants du Paradis*). Then came 21 *Chansons* [21 Songs] in which some of his song-poems, set to music by Joseph Kosma, were printed with their scores. Writing for the October Group and the cinema had accustomed him to working with a team. But along with these joint publications, a book finally came out in May 1946 under his name alone, *Paroles*. It was an immediate – and lasting – success. The absence of article or possessive pronoun suggested that these “ words ” could be the words of everyone. They implied a certain colloquial character, which gave rise to quite a few misunderstandings. The texts by Prévert were meticulously written and highly polished, but above all, he did not want them to remain immobile and permanently imprisoned in a book. This is why many of his poems became songs. He wanted “ a crowd of voices ” to be heard through his voice, the voices of the street, the voices of the oppressed and excluded, and the voices of “ those who have too much to say to be able to say it. ”

## 6 Paroles

### Sheet 14 An original variety

We owe the pleasure of reading Prévert's books to the effective intervention of two men. First of all, in 1939 Henri Michaux persuaded him to continue writing. Then René Bertelé obtained his agreement, after several unsuccessful attempts by other publishers, to publish a collection of his poetry. At the age of thirty-six, Bertelé had recently founded a small publishing house, *Le Point du Jour*. He was editor-in-chief of the journal, *Confluences*, which in March 1945 had published five of the poems that would be included in *Paroles*. For this collection, as in the others that would follow, Prévert discussed with Bertelé the best way to give it a coherent structure. In the first version, the book consisted of texts written between 1931 and 1944. The publisher and author decided to follow a chronological order but also tried to create thematic links between one poem and another. The poem introducing the collection, “ Tentative de description d'un diner de têtes à Paris-France ”, was published for the first time in 1931 by the journal *Commerce*, thanks to the support of Saint-John Perse who introduced it to Léon-Paul Fargue, Valéry Larbaud and Paul Valéry. The book ends with two tributes to Pablo Picasso, “ Promenade de Picasso ” [Picasso's Promenade] and “ Lanterne magique de Picasso ” [Picasso's Magic Lantern], both revealing how close Prévert felt to the painter he had met during his surrealist phase. This first edition contained eighty poems. The final edition appeared in 1947 with the addition of sixteen texts, including the sarcastic “ Souvenirs de famille ” [Family Souvenirs], the oldest piece in the collection since it was published in 1930 in the journal *Bifur*. Inserted between “ La Belle Saison ” [Fine Day] and “ Alicante ”, its length (seventeen pages in the 1947 edition) and prolific style are in sharp contrast to these short and sober poems. This diversity in length and style, one of the author's original features, is intentional and even studied, and the same pattern was used in his following books.

## 7 Time for literature

### Sheet 15 Books to read and look at

After the virulent attack on *Portes de la nuit* by critics in 1946, and the success of *Paroles* that same year, Prévert concentrated on writing as an author and poet (although he disapproved of this term as he felt its meaning was too narrow). However, he did not give up writing for the cinema and continued to do so until the sixties. In 1949, his publisher, René Bertelé, was hit by financial difficulties. As a result, the publishing house was bought over by Gallimard, and *Le Point du Jour* turned into a collection, with Bertelé as its director. Prévert entrusted most of his books to him: *Spectacle* (1951), *La Pluie et le Beau Temps* (1955), *Histoires et d'autres histoires* [Stories and Other Stories] (1963), *Fatras* (1966), “ with fifty seven pictures by the author ”, and *Choses et autres* (1972). But other publishing houses also produced books of his works with illustrations by other artists (photographs or paintings by his friends). The *Guilde du livre* published *Grand Bal du printemps* [The Grand Ball of Spring] in 1951 and *Charmes de Londres* [The Charms of London] in 1952, with photos by Izis. Maeght published *Joan Miró* in 1956, with reproductions by Miró, *Varengeville* in 1968, with reproductions by Braque, and *Fêtes* in 1971, with reproductions by Calder. Muggiani produced *Portraits de Picasso* in 1959, with photos by André Villers, while Berggruen produced *Diurnes*, with photographic interpretations by André Villers of cut-outs made by Picasso. Finally in 1970, Skira published *Imaginaires*, with colour reproductions of his collages. Even when he was not writing specifically for films, his work always had a highly visual effect, achieved either by the generous use of metaphors and unusual comparisons or by relating stories in a succession of images similar to scenes in a film.

## 8 Collages

### Sheet 16 Tender or cruel

Prévert was fond of saying that his different “ means of expression ”, the cinema, literature and collages – which he readily called his “ pictures ” – proceeded from the same approach. And it is indeed true that the many art forms he practised follow a similar pattern. His texts are sometimes composed of collages (titles, quotations or proverbs) and have certain points in common with the film medium. His collages started with ready-made images (photos and reproductions) which he then recomposed and manipulated for his own use, in the same way that he would give a new twist to a cliché. He would, for example, distort a widely used expression, a well-known aphorism, the moral of a fable, or a quotation. His first collage, “ a portrait of Janine ” his wife, was probably made in 1943. He devoted himself to this artistic expression until the end of his life. The collages by Prévert mirror his antipathy for institutions (the church and the army), his sympathy for women and children, his compassion and tenderness towards animals, and a fanciful and dreamlike vision of reality. The dreams and fantasies turned into nightmares in the “ pictures ” of his later years, as in the series of monstrous figures often created out of photos, engravings or drawings of *ecorchés* used to illustrate plates in anatomy textbooks. Nerves, muscles, viscera and bare hearts gave birth to creatures, sometimes appearing to be the tortured and at other times the torturers. Tender or cruel,

reassuring or terrible, Prévert's collages not only demonstrate his art of montage and his skilful mixing of colours but also confirm the inventiveness of his imagination. Picasso is reputed to have told him, on seeing his collages, " You don't know how to paint, and yet you are a painter. "

## 9 Songs

### Sheet 17 When writings fly away

In "Drôle d'immeuble" [Odd Building], a text mentioned in 1938 by Breton and Eluard in their *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, a postman remarks, "Writings fly away but words remain". This in no way means that writings are inferior to words for in Prévert's mind, flight implied both movement and freedom. By using this phrase, repeated in different forms, he wanted to suggest that words should flow in and out of books to remain alive. And words remain alive if they continue to be read or if they are sung. This is why Prévert willingly agreed to have many of his poems set to music. Yet even though the first known poem of his, *Les animaux ont des ennuis* [Animals have their Problems], was written in 1928 to be set to music by a childhood friend, Christiane Verger, he claimed he wrote very few songs. In most cases, in fact, it was the composers who wanted to turn his words into songs. The songs of Jacques Prévert immediately bring to mind the name of Joseph Kosma. But he also inspired many other composers, such as Christiane Verger, already mentioned, Hanns Eisler (who worked with Brecht), Louis Bessières, Wal-Berg, Georges Auric, Jo Warfield, Henri Crolla, Sebastian Maroto and, more recently, Manu Dibango and Vanina Michel. His songs have been interpreted by many talented singers, including Agnès Capri, Marianne Oswald, Germaine Montero, Fabien Loris, followed by Juliette Gréco, Yves Montand, Les Frères Jacques, Mouloudji, Cora Vaucaire, Edith Piaf and Serge Reggiani, and at present Jean Guidoni, Catherine Ribeiro, the " Rap de Vivre " group, and Djemel Charef, to mention a few. It is clear that the writings of Prévert are constantly taking wing through this vocal and popular means of dissemination.

## 10 A rebel with a cause in his late years

### Sheet 18 Solidarity with the oppressed of the world

Until the very end of his life, Prévert showed a deep interest in what was happening all over the world, and regularly expressed his views on current events. In 1950, he defended Henri Martin who had refused to fight against the Indo-Chinese (" People of Vietnam, do you hear... "). The Algerian war and the use of torture aroused his anger, which he expressed in interviews for radio and in texts published mainly in *Fatras* (1966). Quotations from various newspapers, as well as spoken or written remarks by more or less famous individuals, were included in his books to show how certain people could dishonour themselves by their words. For instance, the opinion of an army officer on the possible use of infectious diseases as a weapon is reported without comment. In his interview with André Pozner, published in 1972 in *Hebdromadaires* [Dromedailies], he again quoted articles and books relating to current events, but this time added his comments. In May 1968, he stood by the demonstrating workers and students. His articles in support of the demonstrators and strikers promptly appeared in *L'Enragé* (the May 68 rebels were called " Les Enragés ") and *La Vie ouvrière*.

The succession of popes, far from diminishing his anticlerical feelings, provoked his sarcasm, especially Paul VI because of his position on contraception. In *Rouge* [Red], published in 1971 as a tribute to the painter Fromanger, he repeated his horror of the wars raging all over the world and expressed his fraternal sympathy for the oppressed. This article appeared again in *Choses et autres* (1972), the last book to be published in Prévert's lifetime, which also reflects his disapproval of racism. Angela Davis, a black American teacher who was unfairly accused in 1970 of having bought weapons for a terrorist act, inspired his " Pour la batterie " [Drum Roll!] and " Angela Davis ". The words of Prévert, like those of Victor Hugo in the 19th century, are acts.

## 11 A rejection of definition

### Sheet 19 " Poetry is what we dream about "

" The poetry of Jacques Prévert is (...) poetry intended to be a living denial – and a mockery – of all that *paralyses* the mind in the name of poetry ", wrote Georges Bataille when *Paroles* was published. Prévert had, in fact, distanced himself from what is traditionally known as " poetry ". He refused to define it, like his friend Henri Michaux and, before them, Federico Garcia Lorca whose words he was fond of quoting, " Leave people the business of explaining poetry. Ours may be to compose it but certainly not to explain it. " This is precisely because a definition implies constraint, whereas Prévert sought freedom and movement. To create this effect, his books are a mixture of different genres: poems, dialogues or plays, tales in prose, scripts, short aphorisms ... He believed that definition and knowledge could be obstacles to emotions and to the pleasure of instant sensations. " We live and we love / And do not know what this life is / And do not know what this day is / And do not know what this love is. " He also refused to define humour – with humour, naturally – when he was asked to do so for an article published in *La Nef* in 1950. " We have taken humour too lightly for too long, we must now give it the weight it deserves. So, Gentlemen, define it explain it classify it ration it nip it in the bud dissect it flatter it count it engage it re-engage it engage it in the navy frame it grade it inspect it beatify it polish it constantly and then polish it all over again. " When he agreed – or pretended to agree – to define poetry, it was to talk of the indefinable, the infinite. "Poetry is what we dream about, imagine and desire, it is what occurs frequently. Poetry is everywhere, just as God is nowhere. Poetry is one of the truest and most useful nicknames for life " (*Hebdromadaires*),

## 12 A self-taught man

### Sheet 20 Literary likes and dislikes

Prévert left school shortly after obtaining his primary school certificate. He was fond of saying that he studied the humanities in the street and with the surrealists. And with his father and mother, he might well have added. Suzanne gave him a taste for fairy tales and a world of enchantment. André, who would bring books back home every day, shared his enthusiasm for Zola and Mirbeau. Jacques never stopped reading throughout his life, not only French authors but foreign writers too, and would frequently quote their works and make subtle allusions to them. They often inspired his writing. In " Le Miroir brisé " [The Splintered Mirror], he describes " a little man of youth ", who rediscovers a loved voice through a broken mirror. This idea

came from a passage in *Sodom and Gomorrah* by Proust, in which the narrator, looking down at his ankle boots, suddenly has the impression of hearing his dead grandmother, rediscovered "as in a mirror". The piece by Prévert was published four months after his mother died. "Noces et banquets" [Weddings and Banquets], dedicated to William Blake, makes several references to the man and his work. It would be impossible, however, to give a complete list of all the writers quoted or mentioned in Prévert's work for there are too many of them. The names that appear are the ones of those he loved (including Hugo, Nerval, Poe, Dostoievsky, Melville, Garcia Lorca, Virginia Woolf, Ruth Rendell ... and, naturally, his contemporaries and friends, such as Eluard, Breton, Michaux, Char, Artaud, Desnos ...), as well as those he detested but whose works he nevertheless read attentively (in particular, Pascal, Bossuet, Mauriac, Claudel, Cocteau ...). In "La Boutique d'Adrienne", a tribute made in 1956 to the bookseller Adrienne Monnier, he made an amazing collage of titles and names of personalities, which says much about his knowledge of literature and his love of books.

### Painting

Like literature, painting occupied an important place in the work of Jacques Prévert. He was interested in a wide spectrum of art, starting from the miniatures of *Le Livre du Cœur d'amours esprits* (1457) by René of Anjou, to the paintings by Piero di Cosimo (1462-1521) or Botticelli (1445-1510), and later, Douanier Rousseau (1844-1910), especially his *Sleeping Bohemian*. However, the predominant painters in his work are his contemporaries. He created books with them (Miró, Ernst, Calder, Braque, Chagall, Ribemont-Dessaignes ...), presented their works (Labisse, Magritte, Jorn, Nicolas de Staël, Vasarely, Giacometti, Fromanger, Recalcati, Topor ...), and made many allusions to their drawings and paintings. His greatest affinities appear to be with Picasso and Miró. He shared Picasso's rebellious spirit. He often created, in the manner of this painter, images that he deconstructed and then reinvented, gave unusual points of view on human beings and landscapes, associated elements that had nothing to do with each other, and tried to reconcile opposites. With Miró, the resemblance is even more striking, for when he talks of the painter – particularly in the very fine book entitled *Joan Miró* (1956) – it is as if Prévert is talking of himself. The Catalan has remained a "child filled with wonder". His work has a "mysterious evidence" and "the unusual insolence of simplicity". He is lucid, he is a dreamer, he paints screams, he plays with "big, black and increasingly strident suns", and he has been viciously attacked by critics who have tried, unsuccessfully, to categorise him. "There is a mirror in the name of Miró", he said, probably because he recognised himself in this Miró mirror.

### Music

In the films for which Prévert wrote the dialogues, the characters who like classical music are often evil. Zabel (Michel Simon), the protagonist in *Le Quai des brumes*, a lustful old man and murderer, spends hours listening to religious music. In *Les Enfants du paradis*, Garance (Arletty), forced to become the mistress of the sinister Edouard de Montray (Louis Salou), never sings her favourite songs in front of him for he only likes "grand music". Monsieur Sénéchal, a former collaborator who seems

quite unrepentant about his past, also displays a passion for classical music in *Les portes de la nuit*. Does this mean that Prévert hated this kind of music? The books and collections published after 1951 testify to the contrary. It is possible that the poet acquired a taste for classical music after the war. It was in any event genuine and he continued to enjoy listening to this kind of music until the end of his life. The opening passage of *Le Grand Bal du printemps* (1951) immediately places it under the sign of Stravinsky, for the photographer Izis, whose pictures illustrate the poems, is compared to "a peddler of images / [...] who plays in his manner / especially in winter / the Rite of Spring". *Charmes de Londres* (1952) starts with an extract from the score of Haendel's *Water Music*. References to music are made in several other works, including *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi in *La Pluie et le Beau Temps* (1955), *Wozzeck* by Berg in *Fatras* (1966), and *Carmina Burana* by Orff and *Hymnen* by Stockhausen in *Choses et autres* (1972). During the summer of 1974, he was invited by Arnaud Laster to compose a music programme for radio based on his personal tastes. He did not include many songs, preferring to hear music that he apparently learnt to appreciate quite late in life.

## 13 Language unmasked

### Sheet 23 A distaste for the commonplace

Prévert constantly lashed out at stereotyped language because he felt it hindered progress. Most of the characters in his films or books who make liberal use of clichés are mean, narrow-minded, and cling to the past. The devil himself is also guilty of this failing. When, in *Les visiteurs du soir*, he takes on the appearance of Gilles, the young man Anne loves, she unmasks him as soon as she hears him uttering trite remarks, "You are as beautiful as the day ... I'm madly in love with you ... give me your lips!" The young girl spurns him, declaring, "You look like Gilles, you have taken Gilles' voice, but Gilles would never say the things you are saying". In "C'est à Saint-Paul-de-Vence" (*Histoires et d'autres histoires*), the poet composed a collage of platitudes and banal remarks to describe the conversation of notables talking just for the sake of talking. "[...] what a crowd what heat and how sad a twenty-year old friend it's true relations were a little cold with him but what of it in the face of death do these things really matter man is so insignificant! ah yes insignificant you can say insignificant and we are crossing a vale of tears ...". But how can clichés be avoided? By tackling them, he suggested, from a critical distance, and by diverting them from their original meaning. "Cent fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage à demain si on ne vous paie pas le salaire d'aujourd'hui."<sup>1</sup> He also invited his readers to invent new aphorisms. "Try to be happy, if only to give a good example." And whenever he used commonplace expressions, it was to rejuvenate them, as in "La Cène" [The Last Supper], either by using them literally – "Ils ne sont pas dans leur assiette"<sup>2</sup> or by juggling with homonyms – "De deux choses lune / l'autre c'est le soleil"<sup>3</sup>.

1 (amended version) The literal translation is "One hundred times postpone your work on the loom to tomorrow if you are not paid your salary of today", with a play on the words "métier" [loom or job] and on "remettez" (put back or postpone). This is a twist to a moral from L'Art Poétique by Boileau, similar in meaning to the English proverb "Practice makes perfect".

2 The literal translation of this French expression for "they are feeling a bit off-colour" is "they are not in their plate".

3 This phrase means "It is either one or the other / the other is the sun", and plays on the words "l'une" (the one) and "lune" (the moon).

## 14 Masculine and feminine

### Sheet 24 " Always He / Why not She? "

"Misogyny is predominant in the films of today. As for me, I love women, I prefer them to men. This is obvious in my films. They always have the nice roles", Jacques Prévert told Pierre Ajame in 1967. It is true that the women he created for his scripts enjoyed a freedom that was surprising for the time. They often had a lover before meeting the man of their life, they dared to display their desire, and refused to be kept in a gilded cage. They had a strong character, did not yield to pressure from family and society, fought against powerful men, and claimed their right to happiness and love. The poet also defended women in his books, deploring the priority given in the French language to the masculine gender at the expense of the feminine. " Childish refrains " exclaim a group of little girls with surprise, when they learn that " il " the neutral pronoun for it – which is not supposed to be either masculine or feminine – is identical to the masculine pronoun in the third person singular. " It is raining / It is fine / It is sunny / It is early / It is late / [...], always He / Why not She? " In " Rouge ", the poet is amused by what he calls the chauvinistic " appellation contrôlée " of the name for the "Musée de l'Homme " [Museum of Mankind], and does not see why there shouldn't be a " Musée de la Femme " [Museum of Womankind]. In " La Femme acéphale " (*Choses et autres*), he identifies with the female narrator of this long account in the first person. She has a keen critical sense, and fights hard for her freedom and integrity. Her energy, combined with a profound knowledge, is not appreciated, " [...] my tremendous knowledge was a genuine knowledge, so they found a time-honoured expression from their collection of misogynous quotations, 'Hold your tongue and be beautiful!' I would smile, for I was beautiful and I was myself. " Disdain for women seemed all the more ridiculous to Prévert in that he felt that everyone had something of the masculine and the feminine. And in fact, he loved to describe himself as " masculine feminine plural ".

## 15 Animals

### Sheet 25 Living creatures like us

Animals are featured in several of the films on which Prévert collaborated, for example, a parrot in *Un oiseau rare*, a dog in *Le Quai des brumes*, a horse in *Sortilèges*, a bird and its young (among others) in *Le Roi et l'Oiseau*, a donkey in *Bim le petit âne* [Bim, the Little Donkey], and farmyard animals in " Agnès Bernauer " (a sketch for *Les Amours célèbres*). In much of his writing, the poet described his dismay at the suffering inflicted on animals by humans. He takes a stand against the force-feeding geese and the suffering of calves fed on oestrogen and kept in tiny cages in " Irrespect Humain " [Human Disrespect]. He also points out, as he does on the subject of women, that animals are abused by everyday language. In " Cataire " [Catmint], he noted that men have insulted practically every animal (cows, calves, pigs, camels, etc) except for cats (" they wouldn't dare "). His love for animals is particularly obvious in the long poem published in 1951 under the title *Des bêtes ...* [Animals], illustrated with photographs of animals by Ylla. As is often the case in his work, Prévert includes them in the affection he feels for children, women and certain men (those he loves or those he defends because they are exploited). But when " living creatures " appear in his fables and tales, for

example *Contes pour enfants pas sages* [Tales for Naughty Children], they are more than symbolic figures of oppressed humanity. The poet starts by telling their story and then goes on to suggest that it is sometimes similar to our own.

## 16 The craftsman of language

### Sheet 26 " Putting a fountain pen through words "

The most inaccurate and persistent cliché about Prévert is that he wrote the way he talked, scribbling down words as the ideas came to his head. However, even though he was a brilliant conversationalist, "full of witty remarks, teasing expressions and sharp word games", as Georges Bataille said, and there were, obviously, certain similarities between his manner of speaking and his manner of writing, he set very high standards for himself when he wrote. This misunderstanding may have been due to his habit of spontaneously composing a short poem as a gift whenever he met a friend he liked. But when it came to publishing a text, he worked hard at it, anxious to find just the right word, as well as the appropriate rhythm and pattern. Drafts (not to be confused with manuscripts neatly copied out for the printers) and typewritten sheets which do not always match the published version, testify to his meticulous approach. There are, for example, three versions of the famous " Inventaire ". The first, " Statistiques ", typewritten and dated 1938, is very different from the final form. These preliminary versions are often of great interest. For instance, the three drafts (including one in handwriting) for " Coeur de docker " [A Docker's Heart], published in *Histoires et d'autres histoires*, show successive changes in the linguistic register. The first is a long text of trivial realism and liberally peppered with jargon, the second is written in a simple and familiar language, while the third has been crafted into a refined, elliptical and concise form. As for the files containing his childhood memories, they include many plans, drafts with a large number of erased passages (the same paragraph may be re-written up to six or seven times) and numerous notes. " I do not write with a quill as ideas fly to my head but by laboriously putting a fountain pen through words ", he explained in " Les chiens ont soif " [The Dogs are Thirsty], published in *Fatras*.

**17 Biographical notes**

Sheet 27

**1900-1949**

**1900** Jacques Prévert was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine on 4 February, the second son of Suzanne and André Prévert. The oldest, Jean, was two years old at the time.

**1906** A third son, Pierre, was born. André, who worked for an insurance company, lost his job. The family suffered serious financial difficulties for a year.

**1907** Jacques started school. His paternal grandfather, Auguste Prévert, President of the Paris Central Office for Charitable Works, offered André a job. Jacques was not fond of his austere, Catholic and royalist grandfather.

**1911** Baptism and Certificate of Primary Studies.

**1915** Earned his living doing odd jobs during his slightly dissipated adolescence.

**1920** Started his military service in Saint-Nicolas-de-Port, near Lunéville, where he met Yves Tanguy.

**1921** Finished his military service in Constantinople, where he met Marcel Duhamel.

**1924** Marcel Duhamel rented a house in Montparnasse, at 54 Rue du Château, and put up Tanguy and Prévert.

**1925** Marriage to Simone Dienne. Meeting with the Surrealistic Group which met frequently in Rue du Château. Started participating in the activities of this Group.

**1928** Prévert, Tanguy and Duhamel left Rue du Château. Breton reacted badly to a hoax by Duhamel and Prévert. The latter started to write texts and film scripts.

**1930** Twelve members of the Surrealist Group, including Jacques Prévert, broke away from Anré Breton and published *Un cadavre* against him. The text by Prévert was entitled " Mort d'un Monsieur ". Various publications in journals, in particular, " Souvenirs de famille ou l'Ange garde-chiourme ", which appeared in *Bifur*.

**1931** Saint-John Perse arranged for " Tentative de description d'un dîner de têtes à Paris-France " to be published in the journal *Commerce*.

**1932** Jacques Prévert became the principal author of the October Group.

**1933** Trip to Moscow with the October Group which performed *La Bataille de Fontenoy*.

**1935** Dialogues for Renoir. Estrangement from Simone Dienne.

**1936** Started collaborating with Marcel Carné. Ended his activities with the October Group and distanced himself from the Communist Party and Soviet régime. Death of André Prévert.

**1938** First film with Christian-Jaque. Trip to the United States to join Jacqueline Laurent.

**1939** First film with Jean Grémillon.

**1940** Declared unfit for service by the Seine Commission. Left Paris in June to settle in the South of France. Lived in Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Tourrettes-sur-Loup with Claudy Carter. Kosma and Trauner worked with him secretly on films.

**1942** First meeting with René Bertelé in Nice.

**1943** Started to live with Janine Loris (née Tricotet). First feature film with Pierre Prévert.

**1945** Death of Suzanne Prévert. First film with Paul Grimault. The printing of *Paroles* was completed on 20 December but the book was not released until May.

**1946** Birth of Michèle, daughter of Jacques Prévert and Janine.

**1947** Publication of the screenplay for *Visiteurs du soir, Contes pour enfants pas sages*, with illustrations by Elsa Henriquez, and *Le Petit Lion* with photos by Ylla. Marriage to Janine.

**1948** Fell from a French window of French Radio and spent several days in a coma. He settled for a few years in Saint-Paul-de-Vence with his wife and daughter.

**1949** Publication of the screenplay for *Les Amants de Vérone*.

Sheet 28

**1950-1977**

**1950** Publication of *Des Bêtes...*, with photos by Ylla.

**1951** Publication of *Spectacle* and *Grand Bal du printemps* (with photos by Izis).

**1952** He settled once again in Paris. He travelled to London with Izis for the design of Charms de Londres. Publication of *Lettre des îles Baladar* (illustrations by André François) and *Guignol* (illustrations by Elsa Henriquez).

**1953** Publication of *L'Opéra de la lune* (with drawings by Jacqueline Duhème). He became the Satrap of the Pataphysics College.

**1955** Publication of *La Pluie et le Beau Temps*. He moved to Montmartre.

**1956** Publication of Joan Miró.

**1957** Exhibition of sixty collages at the Galerie Maeght in Paris.

**1959** Publication of *Portraits de Picasso* with photos by André Villers.

**1961** Publication of *Couleurs de Paris* with photos by Peter Cornelius. Pierre Prévert directed *Mon frère Jacques*.

**1963** Publication of *Histoires et d'autres histoires*. Exhibition of one hundred and twelve collage at the Château Grimaldi in Antibes, and then at the Galerie Knoedler in Paris.

**1965** Publication of *Cirque d'Izis* with photos by Izis and lithographs by Chagall.

**1966** Publication of *Fatras*, accompanied by collages by the author.

**1967** Publication of *Arbres* with engravings by Ribemont-Dessaignes.

**1968** Expressed sympathy for the May movement through his writing. Publication of *Varengeville* with reproductions of works by Braque.

**1970** Publication of *Imaginaires* with reproductions of his collages.

**1971** Purchase of a house in Normandy, at Omonville-la-Petite, at the end of Cap de La Hague. Publication of *Fêtes* with etchings by Calder.

**1972** Publication of *Choses et autres* and *Hebdromadaires* (interviews with André Pozner).

**1973** Death of René Bertelé.

**1974** Became the grandfather of a little girl, Eugénie, daughter of Michèle and Hughes Bachelot.

**1975** Publication of *Le Jour des temps* with engravings by Max Papart.

**1977** Jacques Prévert died in Omonville-la-Petite.

## 18 Filmography

Sheet 29

### 1928-1935

This filmography does not include uncompleted projects and scripts that were not filmed. The films are classified in chronological order, by date of production. The name of the director, the nature of Jacques Prévert's participation, and the first public screening [1st P.S.] are indicated in succession.

**1928** *Souvenirs de Paris ou Paris-Express* [Souvenirs de Paris or Paris-Express]. Short film, directed by Marcel Duhamel and Pierre Prévert. Script with Pierre Prévert. 1st P.S. : 1928.

#### 1931 *Baleydiér*

Directed by Jean Mamy, adaptation of a script by André Girard and additional dialogue [unsigned]. 1st P.S. : January 1932.

**1932** *L'affaire est dans le sac* [The Deal is in the Bag] Medium-length film, directed by Pierre Prévert, adaptation of a script by the Hungarian Akos Rathony. Dialogue. 1st P.S. : November 1932.

#### *Ténériffe*

Short film, directed by Yves Allégret. Commentary.

#### *Comme une carpe* [Like a carp]

Short film, directed by Claude Heymann, script, adaptation and dialogue [unsigned]. 1st P.S. : 1933.

#### 1933 *Ciboulette*

Directed by Claude Autant-Lara, adaptation and editing with Autant-Lara of the operetta by Robert de Flers and Francis de Croisset. 1st P.S. : 11 November 1933.

#### 1934 *L'Hôtel du libre échange* [Free-Exchange Hotel]

Directed by Marc Allégret, script and additional dialogue based on a play by Feydeau and Desvallières. 1st P.S. : November 1934.

#### *Si j'étais le patron* [If I Were the Boss]

Directed by Richard Pottier, revised dialogue [unsigned] of René Pujol. 1st P.S. : October 1934.

#### *La Pêche à la baleine* [Whaling]

Short film, directed by Lou Bonin. Jacques Prévert recited his poem [film not released commercially].

Sheet 30

#### 1935 *Un oiseau rare* [A Rare Bird]

Directed by Richard Pottier, adaptation of *Trois Hommes dans la neige* by Erich Kästner and dialogue. 1st P.S. : June 1935.

#### *Jeunesse d'abord* [Youth First]

Directed by Jean Stelli, adaptation of a script by Jean Stelli and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 9 October 1935.

*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* [The Crime of Monsieur Lange]. Directed by Jean Renoir, adaptation of a story by Jean Renoir and Jean Castanyer, and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 24 January 1936.

#### *Taxi de minuit* [Midnight Taxi]

Medium-length film, directed by Albert Valentin. Adaptation of an unpublished short story by Charles Radina and dialogue.

### 1936-1943

#### 1936 *Moutonnet*

Directed by René Sti, adaptation with René Sti of a screenplay by Noël-Noël and Georges Chaperot, and dialogue. 1st P.S. : July 1936.

#### *Jenny*

Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation reviewed by Jacques Constant of a script by Pierre Rocher [*Prison de velours*] and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 18 September 1936.

#### 1937 *Drôle de Drame* [Bizarre, Bizarre]

Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation of a novel by J. Storer-Clouston *His First Offence* and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 20 October 1937.

#### *L'Affaire du courrier de Lyon* [The Courier of Lyon]

Directed (but not signed) by Claude Autant-Lara, dialogue [unsigned]. 1st P.S. : November 1937.

#### 1938 *Les Disparus de Saint-Agil* [Boy's School]

Directed by Christian-Jaque, adaptation (unsigned) of a novel by Pierre Véry [the one by Henri Blanchon "being unsatisfactory" even though included in the credits] and dialogue [unsigned]. 1st P.S. : 13 April 1938.

#### *Le Quai des brumes* [Port of Shadows]

Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation of a novel by Pierre Mac Orlan and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 18 May 1938.

#### *Ernest le Rebelle*

Directed by Christian-Jaque, collaboration (unsigned) on the adaptation and dialogue by Jean Manse, based on a novel by Jacques Perret. 1st P.S.: November 1938.

#### 1939 *Le jour se lève* [Daybreak]

Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation of a screenplay by Viot and dialogue. 1st P.S. : June 1939.

#### *L'Enfer des anges* [The Hell of Angels]

Directed by Christian-Jaque, collaboration [unsigned] on the script by Pierre Véry and dialogue by Pierre Laroche. 1st P.S. : 13 February 1941.

#### 1939-1941 *Remorques* [Stormy Waters]

Directed by Jean Grémillon, script based on a novel by Roger Verel and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 27 November 1941.

#### 1941 *Une femme dans la nuit* [A Woman in the Night]

Directed by Edmond T. Gréville, adaptation and dialogue with Pierre Laroche (unsigned) based on a screenplay by J. Companeéz, revised by Viviane Romance. 1st P.S. : 15 January

#### *Le soleil a toujours raison* [The Sun is Always Right]

Directed by Pierre Billon, script based on a novel by Pierre Galante and dialogue. 1st P.S. : November 1941.

**1942** *Les Visiteurs du soir* [The Devil's Envoys]  
Directed by Marcel Carné, script and dialogue with Pierre Laroche. 1st P.S. : 5 December 1942.

**1943** *Lumière d'été* [The Light of Summer]  
Directed by Jean Grémillon, script and dialogue with Pierre Laroche. 1st P.S. : 26 May 1943.

*Adieu Léonard*  
Directed by Pierre Prévert, script with Pierre Prévert and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 1st September 1943.

#### 1943-1956

**1943-1944** *Les Enfants du paradis* [The Children of Paradise]  
Directed by Marcel Carné, script and dialogue. 1st P.S. : Gala: 1st March, general release : 15 March 1945.

**1944-1945** *Sortilèges* [The Sorcerer / The Bellman]  
Directed by Christian-Jaque, adaptation with Christian-Jaque of a novel by Claude Boncompain *Le Cavalier de Riouclare*, script and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 5 December 1945.

**1945** *Aubervilliers*  
Short film, directed by Eli Lotar, commentary and words of songs. 1st P.S. : February 1946.

*La Bergère et le Ramoneur* [The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep]. Animated cartoon by Paul Grimault, adaptation with Paul Grimault of a tale by Andersen, dialogue, words of songs. Film completed without the authors and not in keeping with their wishes. 1st P.S. : September 1952.

**1946** *Les Portes de la nuit* [Gates of the Night]  
Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation of Prévert's outline for the ballet *Le Rendez-vous*, and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 3 December 1946.

*L'Arche de Noë* [Noah's Ark]  
Directed by Henri Jacques, adaptation with Pierre Laroche of a novel by Albert Paraz *Les Repues franches* and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 4 February 1947.

*Voyage-Surprise*  
Directed by Pierre Prévert, adaptation with Pierre Prévert and Claude Accursi of a novel by Jean Nohain and Maurice Diamant-Berger, dialogue with Pierre Prévert. 1st P.S. : 21 May 1947.

**1947** *Le Petit Soldat*  
Short film, cartoon by Paul Grimault, adaptation with Paul Grimault of a tale by Andersen, *The Tin Soldier*. 1st P.S. : September 1948.

**1948** *Les Amants de Vérone* [The Lovers of Verona]  
Directed by André Cayatte, adaptation of a script by André Cayatte and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 7 March 1949.

**1949** *La Marie du Port*  
Directed by Marcel Carné, adaptation (unsigned) of a novel by Georges Simenon, with Louis Chavance and Marcel Carné. Dialogue (unsigned) with Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. 1st P.S. : 18 February 1950.

*Bim le petit âne* [Bim, the Little Donkey]  
Short film, directed by Albert Lamorisse, commentary. 1st P.S. : February 1951.

**1950** *Souvenirs perdus* [Lost Property]  
A film of sketches, directed by Christian-Jaque, script (unsigned) and dialogue for the sketches "La Statuette" and "Le Violon". 1st P.S. : November 1950.

**1955** *Mon chien* [My Dog]  
Short film, directed by Georges Franju, commentary.

**1956** *Notre Dame de Paris* [The Hunchback of Notre Dame]  
Directed by Jean Delannoy, adaptation of the novel by Victor Hugo and dialogue. 1st P.S. : 19 December 1956.

*Léon la lune* [Leo the Moon]  
Directed by Alain Jessua, introduction.

#### 1957-1973

**1957** *La Seine a rencontré Paris* [The Seine Met Paris]  
Short film, directed by Joris Ivens, poem.

*Ballade chromo*  
Short film, directed by Jean Jabely, commentary.

*La Faim du monde* [Hunger of the World]  
Short film, cartoon by Paul Grimault, script with Paul Grimault. 1st P.S. : 1958.

**1958** *Paris mange son pain* [Paris Eats Bread]  
Short film, directed by Pierre Prévert, commentary.

**1959** *Paris la belle* [Paris the Beautiful]  
Short film, directed by Pierre Prévert, with film sequences shot in 1928 under the title *Souvenirs de Paris ou Paris-Express*, commentary and words of songs. 1st P.S. : 1960.

*Les Primitifs du XIII<sup>e</sup>* [13th Century Primitives]  
Short film, directed by Pierre Guilbaud, commentary with school children. 1st P.S. : 1960.

**1961** *Les Amours célèbres* [Famous Lovers]  
Directed by Michel Boisrond, film with sketches. Script and dialogue for the sketch "Agnès Bernauer". 1st P.S. : 3 November 1961.

**1963** *Le Petit Chapiteau* [The Small Circus]  
Short film, directed by Joris Ivens, commentary.

**1964** *Le Petit Claus et le Grand Claus* [Little Claus and Big Claus]  
Television film, directed by Pierre Prévert, adaptation with Pierre Prévert of a tale by Andersen and dialogue. 1st screening : 13 August 1966.

**1965** *La Maison du passeur* [The Ferryman's House]  
Television film, directed by Pierre Prévert, adaptation with Pierre Prévert of a script by Pierre Prévert and dialogue. 1st screening : 13 August 1966.

**1966** *A la belle étoile* [Under the Stars]  
Directed by Pierre Prévert, adaptation with Pierre Prévert of a novel by O'Henry *The Cop and the Anthem*, and dialogue. 1st screening : 24 December 1966.

**1967** *Le Roi et l'Oiseau* [The King and the Bird]  
Cartoon by Paul Grimault, script with Paul Grimault based on *The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep* [see under 1945] but this time produced according to the wishes of the authors. Dialogue. 1st P.S. : 19 March 1980.

**1969** *Le Diamant* [The Diamond]  
Short film, cartoon by Paul Grimault, script with Paul Grimault. 1st P.S. : 1970.

**1973** *Le Chien mélomane* [The Music-Loving Dog]  
Short film, cartoon by Paul Grimault, script with Paul Grimault.

**Most of the feature films in which Prévert participated as a script and / or dialogue writer are available on videotapes.**

## 19 Selected bibliography

### Works by Jacques Prévert

*Oeuvres complètes*, an edition presented, compiled and annotated by Danièle Gasiglia-Laster and Arnaud Laster, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade" collection, 2 volumes, 1992, 1996 (with the exception of film scripts, all the books published by Prévert are included, as well as some hitherto unpublished material and two posthumous collections, *Soleil de nuit*, 1980, and *La Cinquième Saison*, 1984).

#### Also available in separate volumes, by the same publisher:

*Paroles, Spectacle, La Pluie et le Beau Temps, Histoires et d'autres histoires, Fatras, Choses et autres*, "Le point du jour" and "Folio" collections.

*Grand Bal du printemps* followed by *Charmes de Londres, Hebdromadaires, Soleil de nuit, La Cinquième Saison*, "Blanche" and "Folio" collections.

*Arbres*, "Blanche" collection.

*Contes pour enfants pas sages, Guignol, Le Petit Lion, Des bêtes ...*, *Lettre des îles Baladar, L'Opéra de la lune*.

For an introduction to his works, *Jacques Prévert, un poète*, with a selection of texts presented by Arnaud Laster, "Poésie / Folio-Junior" collection.

#### A number of Prévert's collages can be seen in *Fatras* and *Imaginaires*, as well as in the two Pléiade volumes and in the following books :

*Les Prévert de Prévert*, catalogue of the author's collection, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1982.

*Collages*, Gallimard, 1982, preface by Philippe Soupault, texts by André Pozner.

#### A few scripts and sketches are available :

*Bim le petit âne*, L'Ecole des loisirs, "Renard-Poche" collection, 1976.

*Le Roi et l'Oiseau*, Gallimard, 1980.

*Jenny, Le Quai des brumes*, preface by Marcel Carné, Gallimard, 1988.

*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange, Les Portes de la nuit*, Gallimard, 1990.

*La Fleur de l'âge, Drôle de drame*, Gallimard, 1988.

*Attention au fakir*, followed by *Textes pour la scène et l'écran*, Gallimard, 1995.

*Les Enfants du paradis*, original film script by Jacques Prévert, published by de Monza, 1999 (with an introduction by Bernard Chardère).

### Works on the author and his writing :

#### Biographies

Danièle Gasiglia-Laster, *Jacques Prévert, celui qui rouge de coeur*, Séguier, 1994.

Jean-Claude Lamy, *Prévert, les frères amis*, Robert Laffont, 1997 (biography of Jacques and Pierre Prévert)

Bernard Chardère, *Jacques Prévert, inventaire d'une vie*, Gallimard, "Découvertes Gallimard" collection, 1997 (for an introduction).

Yves Courrière, *Jacques Prévert en vérité*, Gallimard, 2000 [with numerous very subjective accounts which sometimes call for a certain critical discernment].

#### Studies on his work

Arnaud Laster, *Paroles, analyse critique*, Hatier, "Profil d'une oeuvre" collection, 1972.

Joël Sadeler, *A travers Prévert*, Librairie Larousse, 1975.

Michel Fauré, *Le Groupe Octobre*, Christian Bourgois, 1977.

Danièle Gasiglia-Laster présente *Paroles de Jacques Prévert*, Gallimard, "Foliothèque" collection, 1993.

#### Most of analyses and presentations of the literary works of Jacques Prévert, however, can be found in the critical body of the two volumes of the Pléiade.

#### Presentations and studies of the films in which Prévert participated as a script and / or dialogue writer can be found in :

*Jacques Prévert, films en liberté*, texts collected by Carole Aurouet, special issue of the magazine *Cinémaction*, to be published shortly.

Bernard Chardère, *Jacques Prévert, l'insoumis*, catalogue of an exhibition of the 50th International Meeting on the Cinema, at the Bernard-Blier Theatre in Pontarlier, 1997.

#### A few significant articles

Louis Aragon, "Réveillon tragique", *Commune*, n° 22, June 1935.

Antonin Artaud, "Le théâtre français cherche un mythe", *El nacional*, Mexico, June 1936 (reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes* by Antonin Artaud, published by Gallimard).

Georges Bataille, "De l'âge de pierre à Jacques Prévert [or the links between poetry and the event]", *Critique*, n° 3, August September 1946.

Raymond Queneau, "Jacques Prévert, le bon génie", *Revue de Paris*, June 1951.

**Scientific Director:** the writer and critic, **Danièle Gasiglia-Laster**, is an expert on Victor Hugo, Marcel Proust and Jacques Prévert. In the case of Prévert, she co-edited the posthumous collection *La Cinquième Saison* [The Fifth Season], published by Gallimard in 1984. She commented *Paroles* for the "Foliothèque" collection (Gallimard, 1993) and is the author of a biography *Jacques Prévert, celui qui rouge le coeur* published by Séguier in 1994. She is also co-director of the two volumes of the *Oeuvres complètes* of the "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade" (Gallimard, 1992 and 1996).

**Translation:** Nieves Claxton, Astradul, Paris.